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Mr. China's Son

by Shan Haq

(Anthropology 1130)

Everyone is somehow or in some way related to someone else. There are many reasons why people create relationships. Some people derive benefits from certain relationships while in other relationships people can simply derive company. Relationships can not only fill in voids of emptiness, but they can also serve as a mechanism for survival. In He Liyi's autobiography, *Mr. China's Son*, relationships not only served a purpose for survival but also for thriving in life's various stages. In *Mr. China's Son*, the reader can see the metabolic effect that the communist Liberation and education in China has had on the author's relationships with his friends and family. He Liyi's test of loyalty through Guihua, the impact of societal beliefs and stratification on his relationship with his community and family, and the negative effect of economics and society's policies on his relationship with his wife all played a role in breaking or strengthening the author's various relationships. Many of the dilemmas faced in these various relationships are comparable to the variables effecting relationships in Pedro Gonzalez's *A Mayan Life*.

To begin with, He Liyi's relationship with Guihua was tested by social pressures and full of loyalty. When first introduced to Guihua, the reader doesn't feel wrong in assuming that the educational gap between He and Guihua would result in a break up. He himself says, "This was the most troublesome problem I had ever encountered in my life. What on earth was I going to do? Lots of serious problems would arise in my home village if I sent Guihua away. On the other hand, it would be difficult for a college student to organize a happy family life with an illiterate village girl. To tell the truth, I didn't love her as a husband should love his wife, but I pitied her very much" (Liyi 57). From this excerpt it seems that He's relationship to Guihua was very weak. However, by intelligently nurturing his relationship with Guihua, He educated Guihua and mitigated his problems caused by social pressure by giving Guihua the opportunity to be self sufficient and respected. By educating Guihua in Mandarin, He gave Guihua an opportunity to be more than a village girl. However, the couple realized that a family could not be sustained by them even after being married because of the gap that existed between He as a college student and Guihua as a village girl. They decided to get a divorce, but their friendship was solid and lasted through the days in which He was struggling to survive.

Another example was when He returned home from reeducation and was asked by Guihua for marriage again. He knew that if he married Guihua, he would bring bad luck to her through his stained name and history. He says in a letter to Guihua, "One of the most important and most inescapable problems is social pressure, which we might not be able to overcome in the end. You are an advanced medical worker of our country. Your history is as white as new snow. I am a peasant working at the lowest level. My history is as black as dogs' droppings. I am very sorry to have to tell you that I cannot move over to take care of the old man, share his things, and do the rest as you planned at home" (106). It was clear that the powers that existed would cause the same problems for Guihua as they did for He Liyi and for Guihua's best interest, so he rejected Guihua's marriage proposal. This also was a display of true loyalty on He's part for protecting Guihua from himself. The relationship that was forged in Kunming proved to be stronger than He thought when Guihua proves her undying loyalty even after He stops writing letters to her.

When the tables turned and He was punished for being an intellectual rightist, Guihua had become a prosperous doctor. He's relationship with Guihua served as relief aid for when He was

struggling to survive. When He's wife gets in trouble at the market and breaks her leg, it was Guihua who came to the rescue (168). In a letter that she wrote following the event of He's wife's broken leg, Guihua explained how she looked after He's son when He's son caught the whooping cough (171). Guihua saved He's son's life. On numerous occasions when He found himself in a bind, Guihua brought tears of relief and joy to He through the money and support she sent to him (172).

The impact of economic system and social stratification not only affected He's relationship with Guihua, but also with other people. Among his own community, He was always made fun of and given negative nicknames because of his failure at farming and racking up enough work points. He explains, "After a few months in my wife's village, our team leaders started assigning me this second type of collective work. I still did everything in a slow way. I earned the fewest work points in my group every day in every kind of farm work. Most villagers struggled for the second type of work because it offered the opportunity of gaining more work points, but I earned fewer for this type of work than for odd jobs! Sometimes I received only six or seven points. Soon I was known as "Mr. Slowpoke" (119). He was also made fun of for his inferior position in his marriage. He relates, "While I was waiting for her I heard all sorts of remarks from a group of men nearby:

"Come and look! He just came yesterday and today he carries animal droppings.  
What a model husband!"

"What kind of a husband Mrs. He has found, a permanent hand!"

"You don't have a great man's powerful manner. Don't be Mrs. He's tail."

As soon as they saw my wife coming, they ran away" (117). It was definitely hurtful to a man's self esteem. However, all of this changed when He had two sons. Immediately after the birth of his first son, He gained respect in the community.

In another instance, He lost the favor of his father-in-law when He's work points resulted in a small amount of grain. He's relationship with his wife was tested during that time because of the pain his father-in-law was causing him. He says, "And then there was our Lujiang. Had it not been for him, I might really have had a second divorce" (133). At one point, He's father-in-law made He "so angry that I began to wrap up my quilt, having decided to leave for a temple" (134). However, his wife sobbed and convinced him to stay.

Similar problems could be seen in *A Mayan Life* where chasms in social stratification were so deep that the only relationship that Mayans could have with any other social stratum were relationships of hate. Lwin explained how he felt about going to a Ladino school. He described himself as a person with a "false personality and artificial customs" when he was in school and felt happy when being at home among his people (Gonzalez 103). For some Mayans, the conceived inferiority of being a Mayan even affected their most basic relationships. In *A Mayan Life*, Lwin gave the example of a college kid who didn't want his parents to meet him at school because he was afraid someone might see him with his Mayan parents. Social pressures also hurt the Mayans. The only relationships Mayans had with Ladinos were as slaves to their masters on haciendas. However, amongst themselves and their families, Mayans had strong relationships, like He Liyi in *Mr. China's Son*. The only time Lwin felt comfortable was among his own people.

As in Mayan life, while social pressures in China served to create tensions in relationships, the bonds of family and friends forged unbreakable relationships. *Mr. China's Son* teaches its readers that relationships aren't just a bunch of utilitarian phrases like insincerely asking "How are you?" when passing someone or replying "Fine" when being asked about. *Mr. China's Son* teaches its readers that relationships are built on helping others, no matter what, and self sacrifice. Had He not sacrificed himself and rejected Guihua's second marriage proposal, Guihua would have suffered along with He Liyi.

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